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## CRITIQUE OF "WESTWARD HO."

### SETTING.

HAD Kingsley sought far and wide for momentous crises around which to throw the the dress of heroic story, he could not have found two of more significance than those which furnish him the setting of his greatest novels, "Hypatia" and "Westward Ho." In the former he makes use of the fierce death grapple between Greek philosophy and Christianity, out of which Christianity came forth gloriously triumphant; in the latter, of the defeat of the Spanish Armada, a defeat which was at once the death blow to Catholic Spain, and the pledge of life and hope to England and her colonies then being planted beyond the seas. The period treated of in "Westward Ho" is worthy to be sung of in epic measure. It was a period characterized by heroic deeds. England, during the seventies and eighties of the sixteenth century, was experiencing for the first time the thrill of her new, rapidly expanding life. Her commerce, formerly overshadowed by that of Holland and of Spain, was beginning to look to the seas. Her national pride, long dormant, was fast awakening to assume its right position. She was ruled by a queen, keenly alive to the possibilities of the times, to whom all subjects were loyal. She was united in spirit; ~~She was~~ prepared for conquest. Of her Shakespeare could boast, with an exultant thrill of triumph, in "King John:"\*

"This England never did, nor never shall,  
Lie at the proud foot of a conqueror,  
But when it first did help to wound itself."

\*Act 5, Sc. 7.

And Campbell, looking back at her from a later century in which her true strength could be measured in exact terms, could sing:\*

"Britannia needs no bulwarks,  
No towers along the steep,  
Her march is o'er the mountain wave,  
Her home is on the deep."

She was entering, with her Raleighs, her Drakes, her Grenvils, upon her great world conquest, and no power could stay her. For an opponent in this terrible conflict, she had none other than Spain, continuously victorious for a hundred years and rich beyond measure with the gold of Incas and Montezumas. These are the two powers which, for several decades, have been crouching for a final spring. At last it is made. And Spain, haughty, ~~and~~ cruel, and tyrannous so long, goes down—irretrievably down—in <sup>to</sup> defeat. The scenes of this tragedy, out of which a more abundant life was to spring, are laid, to be specific, in Devon, in Ireland, off the coast of England, in the Spanish main, and in New Spain. The final battle-field is the great Atlantic, stretching from the dangerous Orkneys to the rippling bay of Santa Martha. This is the time, these are the events, of which Kingsley treats.

#### PLOT.

- \* Compared with "The Last of the Barons" in ~~reference~~ to breadth of plot, "Westward Ho" is decidedly ~~the~~ less comprehensive. ~~It~~ evidently <sup>it</sup> was not Kingsley's purpose to weave a beautiful cloth of gold in which the forms of many things were to appear, but rather a strong, much-enduring cable, composed of a few tested

\*Ye Mariners of England.

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strands. The plot is limited in scope. The fortunes of Amyas Leigh, the hero, form the central theme of the story. While it is true that the activities of England and Spain and the principles for which those countries stood respectively are accurately set forth, still it is with the adventures of Captain Leigh that Kingsley occupies himself. Thus the plot is unified. Furthermore, the plot is consistent. There are but two circumstances, the truthfulness of which can at all be called in question. Amyas and Frank Leigh found it possible to meet Rose Saltern too easily at La Guayra. Yeo was somewhat slow in discovering his long-lost little maid. But those were days of stirring adventure in which brave knights dared much for fair ladies and in which stalwart Devonshire sailors were not as gifted in detective faculties as is their countryman, Sherlock Holmes, of today. In one respect the convergence of the plot and the suspense of interest may seem to be partially broken. To the reader of the modern novel, stories of vengeance are not so entertaining as stories of love. As a result, when such a reader finds Rose Saltern, the apple of discord among the members of the gallant brotherhood, hopelessly lost to themselves and but partially reclaimed to Frank Leigh, he feels that he has read pages enough. Frank's wish has been partly realized. His persecutors have received their just reward. Why prolong the story further? To see Amyas kill Spaniards indiscriminately, and finally, after he is struck with blindness, tamely surrender his noble heart to a new and alien love, why, that is wholly unromantic. The dénouement is positively stupid. But, in reality, such a reader is altogether mistaken. He fails to note the onward, climactic movement. He fails to



keep up with Amyas. The hero's strides are too long and swift for him. He fails utterly to detect the unifying thread, but of its existence there can be no doubt and it is given here. An intense longing for the life of the sea wrings the strong, already manly heart of Amyas as he stands, a mere youth in years, upon the heights of Lundy, eagery gazing at the gliding sail as they fade, ghost-like and sink into that magic sea which washes eternally the shores of the distant west. Love for the "Rose of Torridge," and a misunderstanding with Master Brimblecombe, send him through the Strait of Magellan on his apprenticeship of toil and obedience. Then vengeance drives him to the ominous overhanging cliffs of La Guayra, and triple vengeance lashes him onward, regardless of tide and storm, to the thundering, spray-clad shutters off Lundy. And then a power, greater than any of these, lays its iron grasp upon him, a power, terrible, yet purifying. It is the beneficent power of suffering, by which, through gloom and brokenness of spirit, he is led to the portal of generous, forgiving love!

*obedience  
and toil.*

#### CHARACTERS.

Kingsley's characters in "Westward Ho" are powerfully drawn. They live. They move. They act according to their opportunities and leave results to care for themselves. It is not necessary to make a detailed, introspective analysis of them. A night's vigil with Mrs. Leigh, as she prays for her sons at sea and meekly resigns herself and them to the Infinite; a hazardous wandering through trackless forests and danger-be-set mountain passes with Amyas; an hour with Yeo at the guns; a glance at Don Guzman, as, at the bottom of the

sea, with the "prawnes and crayfish" swimming around his head, he draws the picture of his "fair and true lady" from his bosom and bids his officers drink to her;—these chance views suffice to show the nobility of Kingsley's characters. How boundless it is! and how clearly it is thrown into relief by its total absence in Eustace Leigh and his associates! These characters are natural, too. Against Frank Leigh alone can the charge of affectation be laid, and that without real justification. He is a courtier, and necessarily, a Euphuist. But beneath his courtly exterior he has a heart. He is more than a courtier. He is a man.

## PURPOSE.

Kingsley had a definite purpose in view when writing "Westward Ho." A bitter anti-Romanist, he wished to oppose a movement of his day, directed by Newman, to lead the Anglican church into the ranks of Catholicism. In order to carry out his purpose most effectively he placed before the public, by means of his novel, a significant object lesson. He exhibited, with rare skill, two characters, one of which he represented as being the natural product of Protestantism, the other, of Romanism—Amyas and Eustace Leigh. Born of the same stock, yet trained under widely different influences, he represents them as growing up to stand for entirely opposite principles. Amyas is dull at his books, he likes the open air, he is big hearted, he honors womanhood, he learns to obey, he rules himself, he speaks the truth, he hates, forgives, loves. He is at every point a man. He is Kingsley's "muscular Christian." On the other hand, Eustace, well equipped mentally and physically,

falls into the care of Jesuits and becomes one himself. Without any appreciation of the truly noble, a veritable tool in the hands of those to whom he sells himself, a traitor to his country and to his blood, he is dismissed with contempt by the author as unworthy of continued mention in the pages of a book in which nothing save manliness is countenanced. Amyas is the product of Protestantism, Eustace, of Romanism. Kingsley holds the two up before a considerate public and asks the burning question: Which will you choose? Thus it is seen why Kingsley chose the closing years of the sixteenth century for the setting of his story. It was the period of a world crisis. Nations still to be born were to rejoice or to be sad at the outcome of the struggle then on. What that outcome would be depended largely upon the character of the men who engaged in the conflict; and their character would inevitably be what their training should make it. What was true of Elizabethan England, Kingsley claimed, would be true of Victorian England. That was the startling, burning truth which he flung blazing before the eyes of his countrymen. That is the truth which "Westward Ho" was to proclaim.

#### STYLE.

Kingsley's fortunate choice of subject, his success in character portrayal, and the momentous import of the lesson which his story teaches, do not account wholly for the strong hold which "Westward Ho" has had upon men. Much of its power must be attributed to the happy style in which it is written. In "Hypatia," and in his other novels, Kingsley seems, at times, unnatural.

He loses himself in his attempt to give expression to what he supposes is philosophical reasoning. He does not know, absolutely, every phase of his subject. But in "Westward Ho," the case is entirely different. He knows himself, as well as his subject. His freshness, his buoyancy, his vigor, effect his style. They make it vital and winning. If analyzed, it will be found to be characterized by naturalness, clearness, vividness.

In just what way Kingsley secures the easy onward movement to be noted in almost all of his sentences, it is difficult to discover. But that his sentences do move naturally, freely, is a fact. In reading "Westward Ho" one never finds himself pent up between two semi-colons, unable to see or move in either direction. One can always glance backward and take his bearing and then move forward in line with the sentence. Numerous short sentences and page after page of natural, spirited conversation, most probably account for this characteristic. Bideford "salts" talk and jest in their own flowing vernacular. Furthermore, they act, and the intensity of their action is reflected in the movement of the sentences in which it is described. They talk while they prime their guns and draw their swords, and what they say under such circumstances cannot be stilted.

Naturalness is a step toward clearness. Accuracy and minuteness of detail and figurative illustration are also essential to perspicuous style. Kingsley is sympathetically accurate. He knows what he describes and feels a keen interest in it. He is scientifically minute, but not coldly so, nor can it be said that he is lacking in that peculiar kind of imagination, which, thrown around scenes and events, makes them warm with life. One



quotation suffices to show his use of accurate, minute detail and pointed illustration:

\*"Her [Mrs. Leigh's] hair was now grown gray; her cheeks were wan; her step was feeble. She seldom went forth from her home, save to the church, and to the neighboring cottages. She never mentioned her sons' names; never allowed a word to pass her lips, which might betoken that she thought of them; but every day when the tide was high, and the red flag on the sand-hills showed that there was water over the bar, she paced the terrace walk, and devoured with greedy eyes the sea beyond, in search of the sail which never came. The stately ships went in and out as of yore; and white sails hung off the bar for many an hour, day after day, month after month, year after year; but an instinct within told her that none of them were the sails she sought. She knew that ship, every line of her, the cut of every cloth; she could have picked it out miles away, among a whole fleet, but it never came, and Mrs. Leigh bowed her head and worshipped, and went to and fro amongst the poor, who looked on her as an awful being, and one whom God had brought very near unto Himself, into that mysterious haven of sorrow which they too knew full well. And alone women and bed-ridden men looked in her steadfast eyes, and loved them, and drank in strength from them; for they knew she had gone down in the fiercest depths of the fiery furnace, and was walking there unhurt by the side of One whose form was as of the Son of God."

Kingsley is also intensely vivid. Long after "West-word Ho" has been read scenes sketched within it remain

\*W. H., Ch. 28.



fixed, rooted, in the reader's mind. They are more than mere scenes. They are veritable pictures which live either in nervous quivering outline, or in intense vividness of color. With a few strokes of the pen he dashes off pictures which live for the same reason that pictures in the "Vision of Sudden Death," in "The Spanish Nun," and in the "Ancient Mariner" live. Quotations from "Westward Ho" will illustrate what is meant by nervous quivering outline and intense vividness of color.

\* "And in fact, they [Raleigh and Amyas] could now hear plainly the 'Ochone, Ochonorie,' of some wild woman; and scrambling over the boulders of the knoll, in another moment came full upon her.

"She was a young girl, sluttish and unkempt, of course, but fair enough; her only covering, as usual, was the ample yellow mantle. There she sat upon a stone, tearing her black dishevelled hair, and every now and then throwing up her head, and bursting into a long, mournful cry. \* \* \*

"On her knees lay the head of a man of middle age, in the long soutane of a Romish priest. One look at the attitude of his limbs told that he was dead.

"The two paused in awe; and Raleigh's spirit, susceptible of all poetical images, felt keenly that strange scene, the bleak and bitter sky, the shapeless bog, the stunted trees, the savage girl alone with the corpse in that utter desolation. \* \* \*

"It was the body of a large and coarse-featured man: but wasted and shrunk as if by famine to a very skeleton. The hands and legs were cramped up, and the

\* W. H., Ch. 11.

trunk bowed together, as if the man had died of cold or hunger."

\* "The bay of Santa Martha is rippling before the land breeze, one sheet of living flame. The mighty forests are sparkling with myriad fire-flies. The lazy mist which lounges round the inner hills shines golden in the sunset rays; and, nineteen thousand feet aloft, the mighty peak of Horqueta cleaves the abyss of air, rose-red against the dark-blue vault of heaven. The rosy cone fades to a dark dull hue; but only for awhile. The stars flash out one by one, and Venus, like another moon, tinges the eastern snows with gold, and sheds across the bay a long yellow line of rippling light. Everywhere is glory and richness. What wonder if the earth in that enchanted land be as rich to her inmost depths as she is upon the surface? The heaven, the hills, the sea, are one sparkling garland of jewels—what wonder if the soil be jeweled also? if every water-course and bank of earth be spangled with emeralds and rubies, with grains of gold and feathered wreaths of native silver?"

An analysis of Kingsley's style should reveal, in addition to these characteristics, another which is to be noted in "Westward Ho," but not elsewhere in the author's writings, and of which, so far as it can be ascertained, no critical mention has heretofore been made. As has already been pointed out, this story is decidedly English. It portrays, with singular accuracy, the England of Elizabeth. It pictures not only the queen and her hardy sailors in their opposition to Spain, but also, Elizabeth and her court in their minute observance of a

\* W. H., Ch. 26.

thousand and one formalities. It reflects, not in an exaggerated, inartistic way, the Euphuistic influences of the time. True to his seamen, Kingsley is equally true to his courtiers, especially so in his representation of their actions in matters pertaining to honor and love. Having a deep reverence for their genuine worth, in spite of their seeming absurdities, he sketched them upon his canvas as Raleighs and Sidneys should have been sketched—sturdy and brave in the practical realities of life, polished and formal to the point of affectation in the refinements of the court. Their praise of the queen and of her attendants was superlative and studied; their trivial sententiousness was refined almost beyond the limit of endurance; their classical references were numerous; their figures were far-fetched and frequently drawn from a fabulous natural history; and their sentences, tricked out in every rhetorical device, were ornate to the last degree. In these respects, however, they were genuine Euphuists, true disciples of Lyly, and are worthy of the defence which Kingsley makes in their behalf in contradistinction to the less noble and more pedantic followers of Gabriel Harvey whom Scott, mistaking for genuine Euphuists, rather poorly typifies in his well-known character, Sir Percie Shafton. In "Westward Ho" Frank Leigh represents, better than any other of Kingsley's characters, the peculiarities of the courtier. It is in his expressions that traces of Euphuism are to be noted. Quotations from his speeches made at the celebration of Amyas Leigh's first return and at the formation of the Brotherhood of the Rose will illustrate this peculiarity of style excellently. With



these words, directed to the Lady of Bath, he makes his first bow to the public:

\*"Since the whole choir of Muses, madam, have migrated to the Court of Whitehall, no wonder if some dews of Parnassus should fertilize at times even our Devon moors."

And later, he becomes better known to his readers through these ornate sentences which fall upon the astonished ears of the members of the Brotherhood:

†"How, then, shall lovers make him [Cupid] the father of strife? Shall Psyche wed with Cupid to bring forth a cockatrice's egg? or the soul be filled with love, the likeness of the immortals, to burn with envy and jealousy, division and distrust? True, the rose has its thorn; but it leaves poison and stings to the nettle. Cupid has his arrow, but he hurls no scorpions. Venus is awful when despised, as the daughters of Proteus found, but her handmaids are the Graces, not the Furies. Surely he who loves aright will not only find love lovely, but become himself lovely also."

"Westward Ho," as judged by the most important critical standards, is the greatest of Kingsley's creations. Having its very being in one of the most supreme crises known to men, it is necessarily a story far removed from the commonplace. It is living, vital. Loveliness and nobility of character are stamped upon its every page. Men can learn from it the important lessons of life—the value of energy and character. To them it offers hope and cheer. It is a noble creation. It is worthy of being read.

L. R. WILSON.

\* W. H., Ch. 2.

† W. H., Ch. 8.